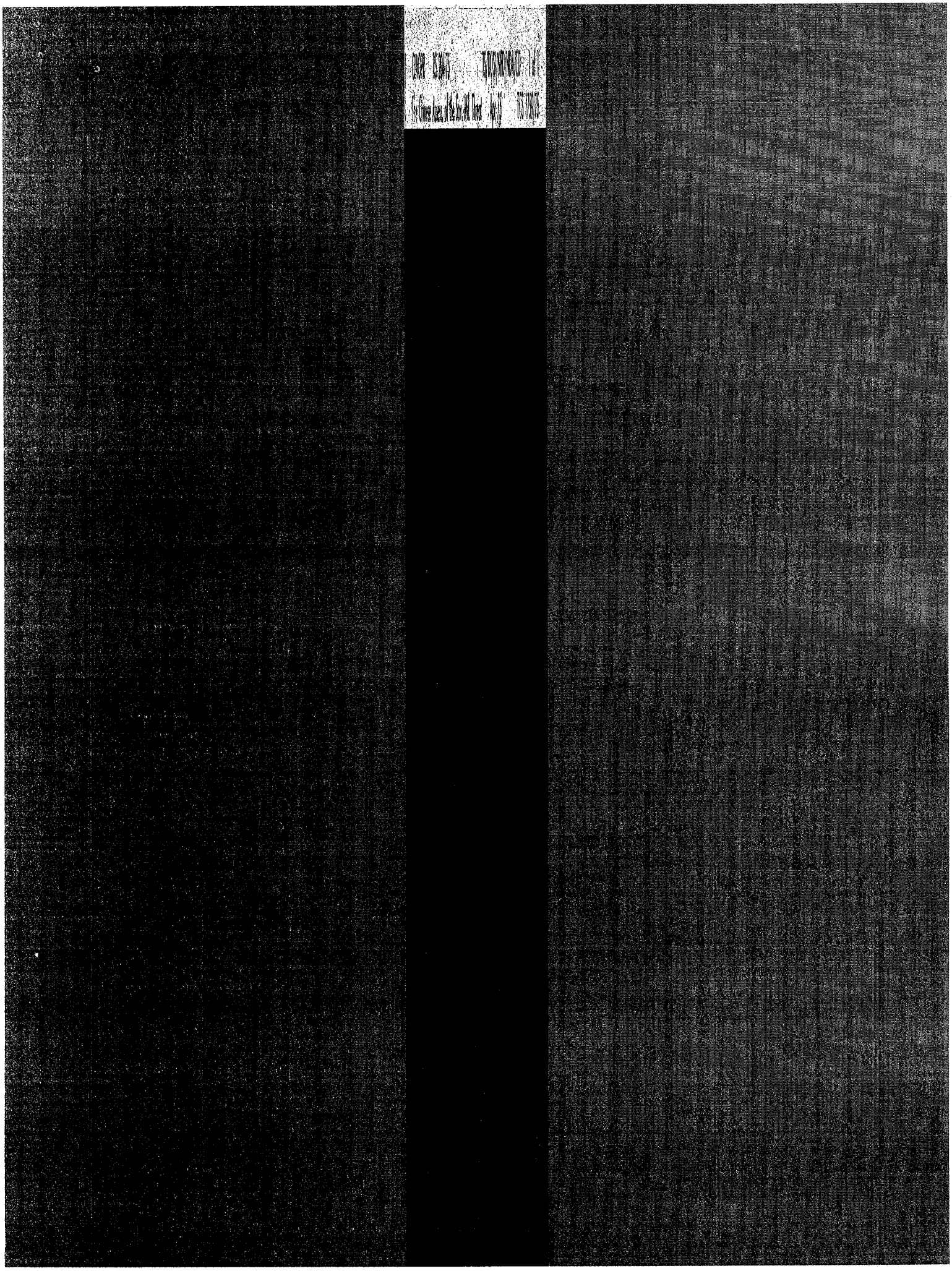

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Research Study

The Chinese Assessment of the Soviet Military Threat

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CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

DIRECTORATE OF INTELLIGENCE

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April 1975

THE CHINESE ASSESSMENT OF THE SOVIET MILITARY THREAT

CONTENTS

NOTE: Several other components of the Directorate of Intelligence have been helpful in the preparation of this paper. These include the Office of Strategic Research (OSR/TF/G, OSR/PA/E, OSR/EF/P, OSR/RA/U, OSR/EF/S, OSR/EF/T, and OSR/SEC), the Office of Economic Research (OER/C/RE), the Office of Current Intelligence (OCI/USSR-EE/SRE), and the [redacted] as well as the Soviet/East European Staff of OPR itself. However, formal coordination has not been sought. The judgments expressed are the responsibility of the writers, [redacted] Asian Communist Staff, OPR [redacted]

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INTRODUCTORY NOTE

This study is of the Soviet military threat to China as the Chinese see it—in terms of both Soviet capabilities and Soviet intentions. The study is concerned with the Chinese view of:

— the possibility of an escalation of the Sino-Soviet border conflict, a conflict provoked originally by the Chinese themselves; and

— the possibility of a Soviet decision to launch a massive conventional attack or a disarming nuclear strike for larger strategic reasons, i.e., to dispose of an intransigently hostile potential superpower.

Western observers—inside and outside the intelligence community—have reached very different conclusions about the chances of a Soviet military attack on China, whether growing out of the border conflict or deriving from Soviet assessments of the overall strategic situation. We have thought that the statements and actions of the Chinese themselves, as the most interested parties, might be illuminating.

The Chinese have given to various audiences at various times very different assessments of the prospects of Soviet attack—in a range from alarmist to complacent—so that it has been necessary to evaluate these statements in the context of Chinese actions of the time. We have reviewed all available Chinese statements on this matter, and we have tried to distinguish between statements that seemed to represent genuine assessments—i.e., were consonant with Chinese actions—and those that seemed to be made for a variety of political purposes.

Our analysis centers on the former: the Chinese assessment of the degree of danger of a Soviet attack at well-marked points in the evolution of the Sino-Soviet relationship. We attempt to reach sharper conclusions than the well-known and generally-accepted one that the Chinese for the past decade have felt threatened by the Soviet Union.

The effort here is to track the genuine Chinese assessment as it has changed at different times to determine:

— whether the Chinese have ever truly feared that a Soviet attack, however originating, might be imminent;

— if so, what political and military measures they took at that time to reduce the prospect of an attack;

— whether their assessments of the prospect of attack, however originating, have shown a long-term pattern of change, a consistently rising or declining curve;

— and what their view of the Soviet military threat is today, and what they are doing about it.

The Chinese view of the threat from the border dispute—which is just one part of a Sino-Soviet conflict across the board—depends upon Peking's assessment as to whether it can keep alive Mao Tse-tung's claims to Soviet border areas which have never been under Chinese Communist jurisdiction, and to establish Chinese presence in these areas, without seriously risking a large-scale Soviet military attack. The central questions in the Chinese assessment of the prospect of a Soviet strategic attack on China as a whole are whether the Chinese feel that the Russians are seriously tempted to make such an attack, and if so, whether the Chinese calculate that they can persuade Moscow that this could not be done at acceptable political and military cost.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

In their patrolling of the Sino-Soviet border during the early and mid-1960s, Chinese leaders were not frightened by Soviet threats. It was not until 1969, following the Chinese ambush of Soviet border guards, that the Chinese came to believe that a major Soviet attack on China might be imminent.

The one Chinese fright—in August and September 1969—derived partly from localized Soviet military action but mainly from Soviet threats of larger actions which were credible to the Chinese, causing them to conclude that their policy of the time—of asserting territorial claims by aggressive forward patrolling on the border—was more dangerous than they had estimated. Mao backed off from a confrontation; he decided to avoid additional provocation by halting the patrols, and he agreed to resume negotiations with the Soviets.

The hard line taken by the Chinese in the negotiations, however—refusing to make any concessions and insisting on a withdrawal of Soviet forces from Chinese-claimed areas before substantive discussions could begin—showed that fear that a Soviet attack might be imminent dropped off sharply once the talks had begun.

Because the Chinese since 1969 have avoided provoking the Soviets at the border, they have not needed to fear an escalation as much. The pattern seems to show a steadily declining curve.

Nevertheless, beyond the question of border provocations, the Chinese have remained concerned about the continuing strategic military threat. Here too the pattern has been one of declining concern, but in the nature of the case the concern cannot be eliminated.

The Chinese have taken various measures, military and political, to reduce the danger of a possible Soviet attack. They have continued to improve their defenses against ground attack, and to develop their own nuclear forces as a sobering if modest deterrent. Also to serve the interest of deterrence, they have at times magnified and at times downplayed Soviet military capabilities and intentions. This has put the Chinese in the somewhat absurd position of arguing, in one period, that China was greatly threatened (requiring Western pressure on Moscow to desist), and, more lately, that China is not so threatened

but that the *West* is (so that NATO forces should not be reduced). While the arguments adduced for a tough Western military posture toward the USSR have changed, the results desired have not.

The Chinese view today is short of fear, but also short of complacence. They are therefore continuing to develop their military strength and to encourage a strong Western strategic disposition against the Soviets—a NATO-Warsaw Pact confrontation—which will reduce both the short-term and the long-term threat to China.

After Mao's death, some Chinese leaders will probably actively argue that Peking should seek a border settlement on reasonable terms (which the Chinese have not done to date), again seeking to reduce both the short-term and the long-term threat. In the meantime, even the Mao-dominated leadership will probably avoid direct physical provocation on the border.

Peking can be expected to maintain that China will retaliate if attacked, while emphasizing that China's military posture is defensive (as it is). At the same time, the Chinese will probably try to sustain and strengthen the Sino-American rapprochement as a stronger long-term deterrent to Soviet attack than China itself can provide. But because the Chinese intend to win Taiwan, they will seek to persuade the US that China does not need such rapprochement at the cost of a halt in US disengagement from Taipei. Should it come to a choice, the value to Peking of rapprochement, against the Soviet threat, would probably prove greater than that of early annexation of Taiwan.

In sum, the Chinese probably conclude that:

(1) They can avoid an escalation of the border conflict simply by avoiding provocation;

(2) In the immediate post-Mao situation, the Soviets, rather than intervening militarily in China, are likely to wait for the post-Mao leadership to make or respond to initiatives for an improvement in relations; and

(3) Even failing an early improvement, the Soviets would be unlikely to choose to accept the political and military costs of a strategic attack on China, but would probably continue to wait (as they could well afford to wait), hoping for better from some successor Chinese leadership.

THE DISCUSSION

I. THE SOVIET ALLY BECOMES A MILITARY OPPONENT: 1963-1969

Chinese perception of the Soviets as an enemy was an incremental, not a sudden development. After the outbreak of the Sino-Soviet dispute into public polemics in 1960, it was three years before the Chinese leaders came to view the Russians seriously as a potential military adversary. Chinese strategic thinking in the early 1960s had envisaged possible attacks from US-supported Nationalist forces in the east (across the Taiwan Strait) and Indian forces in the southwest, but had given little attention to the possibility of Soviet initiated hostilities on the northern and western borders until mid-1963. For example, in the fall of 1962, when the Chinese began to build a string of border defense stations in the northeast manned by Public Security troops, it was primarily for the purpose of preventing refugees from crossing into Soviet territory and secondarily for the purpose of keeping Soviet agents out. Even when, in the spring of 1963, the main mission of these troops became that of disputing Soviet-controlled territory (primarily islands in the two border rivers, the Amur and the Ussuri), no shooting occurred and the Chinese seemed to feel that the only military confrontation they had to worry about was pushing-and-shoving engagements at the border between border guard patrols. However, by the summer of 1963, both sides increased the number of troops near the border.

A. First Chinese Perception of a Soviet Military Threat: 1963

Khrushchev, annoyed by Mao's new policy of trying to dispute Soviet-held border territory, issued at first oblique and then direct warnings that asserting claims by aggressive patrolling might trigger a major Soviet military response. In late July 1963 he implied, [redacted] that Chinese actions might start a world war," and by mid-October Moscow was reported to have warned Peking that a continuation of border probing might provoke from the USSR "a decisive blow." On 2 August, the Peking *People's Daily* reflected the Chinese assessment that a serious threat existed; for the first time the Party paper complained of a "US-Soviet alliance against China." Between October and December, several Chinese leaders referred privately to the possibility that the Soviets would attack China. However, it is unlikely that the Chinese had suddenly come to fear that a major Soviet attack, conventional or nuclear, was a *near*-term possibility. The Sino-Soviet agreement to start border talks in February 1964 did not result from Soviet pressures; it was a development which the Chinese had set in motion in 1963 *before* the Soviets had made their threatening statements.

Khrushchev's position during the negotiations was to refuse to withdraw Soviet forces from areas held by the Soviets well before Mao's regime had been established in 1949, but to make an exception of certain small islands in the border rivers. Mao wanted, by contrast, a Soviet political capitulation: a declaration that the treaties between the tsars and Imperial China had been "unequal." He also wanted the big river island opposite Khabarovsk. Mao could not be mollified; he broke the secrecy of the talks by making a public statement on 10 July 1964, and he taunted Khrushchev by declaring that he would continue the Sino-Soviet dispute with impunity—free from the danger of Soviet attack.

> Regarding war on paper, there are no dead in such a war. We have been waging such a war for several years already, and not a single person has died. We are prepared to wage this war another 25 years. (Mao statement of 10 July, printed in Tokyo *Shekai Shuho* on 11 August 1964.)

Khrushchev was convinced by this Chinese resort to public maneuver and by the course of the secret talks that it was useless to continue to negotiate with Mao. He withdrew the Soviet delegation on 15 August. In the strongest public threat to use nuclear weapons against China ever made by

Khrushchev, he warned that it would be "dangerous" to encroach on Soviet borders "given up-to-date weapons of annihilation" in the Soviet arsenal (speech of 15 September 1964). His policy was thus now to "rattle" nuclear weapons toward China, as he had done in the past to many other countries.

However, Mao and his lieutenants were able, given this clearly marked pattern of Khrushchev's behavior, to distinguish a bluff from a real threat of imminent attack. Chinese perception of the credibility of a Soviet threat was highly context-dependent, keyed to the positioning of Soviet forces. Khrushchev had failed to frighten the Chinese into ceasing their border probes because he had not made his threats sufficiently credible, either by deploying tactical nuclear weapons or by a big conventional buildup of regular forces on the frontier.

By contrast, the post-Khrushchev Soviet leadership avoided threatening China with a nuclear strike (until 1969). The Soviet leaders were willing, however, to make moves which were more costly in terms of committing military manpower and resources to the border area. Starting in the fall of 1965, they began to send in regular army units to provide more solid "muscle"—against possible Chinese harassment—than the border guard units had provided. In January 1966, a Politburo decision to station regular Soviet units in Mongolia was carried out, and the Chinese began to complain that "rocket bases" had also been established in Mongolia. The Chinese were aware of the Soviet buildup, and they seem to have had an increased sense that a war with the USSR, including the engagement of major ground forces, was a real possibility. This view was privately expressed by Chou En-lai in early 1966 and by Teng Hsiao-ping (among others) in mid-March. However, they still apparently did not perceive the threat of a major war as *imminent*: they spoke only of an "eventual" or an "inevitable" war with the USSR. Nevertheless, the USSR in fact had become the PRC's principal enemy, although not yet in official statements and documents.

B. First Serious Consideration of Being a Possible Nuclear Target: 1966

Chou and Teng in early 1966 had been speaking about Soviet conventional forces, but shortly thereafter, the Chinese for the first time seemed to *take seriously* the possibility that the Soviets would use nuclear weapons against them, whether in escalation of the border conflict or in a massive disarming strike. This new assessment was reflected in a public interview given by former Foreign Minister Chen Yi, who declared that:

> Soviet missiles may one day fly from Moscow to Peking. Peking is already an atomic target. (Quoted by a Uruguayan newsman in *Marcha*, 1 May 1966.)

It is possible that this new calculation of Soviet intentions was based on the speech of 17 March made by the Mongolian defense minister. He warned the Chinese that his forces now had "rockets" (unspecified). (By the winter of 1967, Soviet forces in Mongolia had short-range nuclear-capable Frog rocket launchers; these weapons are not known to have been in Mongolia in 1966.) The Chinese may have considered it prudent to take this statement seriously [redacted] The defense minister's statement in March is the only known exception to the Soviet policy of avoiding public threats of nuclear attacks on China between 1965 and 1969.

The Soviets showed concern—as they had in the summer of 1964—about Vladivostok as the city most vulnerable to Chinese ground attack. It was in Vladivostok that Brezhnev made the remark that the Soviet Far East is a land "whose every foot" glorifies the courage of Russian man (speech of 19 May 1966). Podgorny in Khabarovsk spoke on 1 June of the need to "guard" and "if necessary, defend" the USSR's Far East borders. The Soviets continued to build up their regular army units along the frontier.

In 1966, the Chinese deployed their first medium-range (600nm) CSS-1 missile launcher in the Shenyang Military Region, north of Dairen. At approximately the same time, the Soviets began what became a four-year program to deactivate their medium-range and intermediate-range missiles in the Far East. The Soviet action was primarily related to the deployment of the more sophisticated and longer-range SS-11 missiles, with target sectors covering China, in the western USSR. It undoubt-

edly was significant, however, that the new SS-11 sites were less vulnerable to air or missile attack from the PRC.

C. Chinese Continue to Believe a Soviet Attack Not Imminent: 1967-1969

Chinese actions in this period reflected an apparent belief that any Soviet attack in the near future would be conventional in nature, if it came at all, and planning continued to be for the *distant* future. Although construction was begun on some new airfields, and several early-warning radar sites were established near the border, the Chinese did not substantially increase their forces in 1966. Moreover, military contact with Soviet troops was limited to border patrol encounters, and both sides adhered to no-shooting policies. And when, in early 1967, the Chinese began construction on a large mounded defensive position near the Shuangchengtzu missile test center, it was along a possible land-invasion route leading from Mongolia. Peking kept the level of its own actions down to small-scale border probes. The Chinese continued to back up their claims by probing.

Pushing-and-shoving encounters on the Amur and Ussuri river islands, incited by Red Guards and Chinese border patrols rejecting Soviet border guard demands to cease patrolling and return to the Chinese bank, reportedly were widespread in the winter of 1967 during Mao's Cultural Revolution. (The 1969 fighting was at points which had been tense for at least two years.) Not only did the Soviets not rattle their nuclear weapons against the Chinese publicly, but also there is no evidence of private warnings to the Chinese in this period to desist on the border or face a Soviet nuclear attack.

At some time between February and October 1967, a new landmobile nuclear missile system (Scaleboard) was deployed at three points along the Chinese border, providing Soviet field commanders with a tactical weapon which could hit targets up to 450 miles within China. Also in 1967, Moscow was in the initial stages of deploying the 160-mile wheeled tactical missile launchers (Scud) in the Soviet Far East. The Chinese may have detected these deployments, using their COMINT capability, but, if they did, this information did not deter them from continuing a policy of forward patrolling at the border. Moreover, the fact that they did not reposition the bulk of their forces northward suggests that they believed their patrolling would not provoke a Soviet attack.

The Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia—another socialist country—on 21 August 1968 shocked the Chinese out of their complacency, although they did not regard an attack on themselves as any more of an imminent possibility. On 16 September they publicized a note of protest concerning what was, in fact, an unusually heavy concentration of Soviet overflights around the northeast border in August, of much greater frequency than in previous years. Such open disclosure was a break with the practice of delivering such notes privately.

Three days later, Chou En-lai stated publicly that the Russians were creating border tensions "by even more frequently sending planes to violate China's airspace."

Evidence that the Chinese judged an attack on China must be considered a continuing possibility, although not imminent, is found in Foreign Minister Chen Yi's 19 September statement to Cambodia's Foreign Minister:

> Some claim that the USSR will not attack China. We do not believe this. Brezhnev and Kosygin believe themselves to be very powerful militarily because of the atom bomb. They have massed eight divisions of Soviet troops in Mongolia and have installed rocket bases. They have a concentration of more than 300,000 men on the Chinese border.

Chen Yi's figure as to the total of Soviet troops was probably fairly accurate, although there were no more than two—not eight—Soviet divisions in Mongolia. (In other words, the Chinese were not yet grossly exaggerating the Soviet threat, in terms of numbers of men.) Regarding the matter of China as a nuclear target, the Chinese asserted that "the USSR is engaged in setting up . . . nuclear bases around China to intensify nuclear threats against China." (Peking *People's Daily* article of 21 September 1968) The Chinese of course recognized that their own actions provoked the buildup, but, as

often observed in Peking's behavior, they wanted to have things both ways—to persist in disputing Soviet control of Chinese-claimed territory but nevertheless to stop the buildup.

It is necessary to reiterate that, despite this post-Czechoslovakia assessment, the Chinese did not seem to feel that the danger of a major Soviet attack was *imminent*. Thus, they sustained their forward patrolling along the border, disputing Soviet control of certain border areas, mainly the islands in the Amur and Ussuri rivers, and calculating that the Soviets would not be provoked into striking back with a major attack. When Chou En-lai in a speech on 29 September complained about overflights and "massive troop concentrations" on the border, he went on to say that Moscow's "military threats and war blackmail" would have "no effect whatsoever."

II. IMMINENT POSSIBILITY OF A MAJOR SOVIET ATTACK: 1969

Mao and his aides clearly believed themselves to be expert in assessing the degree of tolerance in the policy of a military superpower confronting China. They had been engaged in one war (Korea) in which they risked the US use of nuclear weapons and had gone to the brink of war twice (the two Taiwan Strait crises in 1954 and 1958)—and had emerged from each confrontation with a conviction that they had had some leeway for probing to gauge US determination to defend friendly countries. They seem to have transferred their conviction—that they were expert in assessing a superior adversary's tolerance of probing—to their confrontation with the Soviets.

A. Chinese Provocations: March-August 1969

The Chinese leaders in 1969 tested the degree of Soviet tolerance of provocation as they carried out a policy of forward patrolling to contest Chinese-defined "disputed" areas, keeping the probes down to small-scale encounters. Mao and his aides undoubtedly calculated that they had leeway to engage in such encounters with conventional weapons without provoking a major Soviet attack against China. They seem to have anticipated retaliation by small Soviet conventional-force units only. They guessed right about the *level* of Soviet retaliation. Between 2 March and mid-August, every Soviet riposte to Chinese patrol probes was carried out with such conventional ground weapons as artillery, tanks, armored personnel carriers, and automatic rifles. No aircraft were used, nor did the Soviets expand the conflict from the immediate areas of the skirmishes. Soviet conventional weapons, and the mobility supplied by their armored personnel carriers, were sufficient to defeat each of the Chinese border units they were used against. However, the Chinese policy remained within the confines of rational calculation, and despite Soviet charges of Chinese "madness," there was method in it. The level of Chinese provocation was also kept down by spreading the attacks out in time, by the use of small units, and by Chinese probing at a variety of points.

The Chinese ambush of a Soviet border guard unit on Chen Pao Island on 2 March was a definite escalation. Mao and his aides appear to have chosen that particular Ussuri River island which provided them with the strongest case of Chinese ownership: Chen Pao was not only on the Chinese side of the main navigational channel in the Ussuri, but also was virtually a part of the Chinese bank. The opposing Soviet border guard unit at least twice previously (in late January and early February; in the latter instance, riflebutts were used by both sides in a fight) had come out across the river ice to the Chinese side onto Chen Pao to order Chinese forces to withdraw. Mao undoubtedly had been angered by this bullying, and apparently was determined to demonstrate to the Soviet leaders that their nuclear capability against China would not impose passivity on Chinese forces, border units included. The ambush of Soviet forces at Chen Pao escalated the dispute to a major shooting incident. In subsequent engagements at Chen Pao and other points along the border, the Soviets used their superior firepower to effectively defeat Chinese units entering Soviet-controlled territory.

Following the first battle for Chen Pao, Mao refused to accept any Soviet military presence there, and he was unwilling to retreat from the challenge when the Soviets sent armored personnel carriers onto the island. His personal commitment was indicated on 12 March, when, at a meeting of representatives at the border, a Chinese officer read an "instruction from Chairman Mao" demanding that the Soviets stay off Chen Pao or face a new fire-

fight. A new firefight did occur on 15 March and, despite a Chinese defeat by Soviet troops using armored personnel carriers, tanks, and artillery, Mao continued to contest the island and other territory along the border. Although a hasty shelter program was initiated within China in the spring, and there was some evidence of tanks and artillery being dispersed and revetted against a possible air attack, Mao's actions on the border made it clear that he was not intimidated.*

As they carried out their forward patrolling onto disputed territory, and as their border guard units were defeated in almost every small-scale firefight, the Chinese kept alert for signs that the Soviets might be considering a nuclear strike against Chinese targets. What they seem to have perceived were Soviet political signals intended to frighten them into desisting on the border.

Soviet envoys abroad informed governments (among others) privately that Moscow would take any steps necessary to force the Chinese to stop border probing. These vague warnings conveyed in mid-March were not as explicit as the threat to use nuclear weapons if necessary, which was made by the less official Soviet instrument, Moscow's Radio Peace and Progress:

> . . . are we afraid of Mao Tse-tung and his pawns, who are making a display of might on our border? . . . The whole world knows that the main striking force of the Soviet armed forces is its rocket units. (Broadcast of 15 March 1969.)

Peking later (on 2 June) complained about this threatening language and showed some concern, but the Chinese calculated correctly that the Soviet leaders would continue to avoid striking back with a major attack.

In addition to trying to frighten the Chinese leaders, the Soviets decided to pursue urgently a political solution to the border dispute by persuading the Chinese to resume the negotiations broken off in 1964. However, these Soviet political moves seem to have worked *against* Moscow's effort to frighten the Chinese. The Chinese leaders perceived the urgency of Moscow's desire to tie them up in border talks. The Soviets, in a note of 11 April, urged the Chinese to arrive in Moscow within four days for consultations. This hint of anxiety exposed the Soviet leaders to a taunt, very characteristic of Mao, which was delivered derisively

The Soviets then proposed, as an interim measure, that Peking send a delegation to Khabarovsk to resume the joint commission meetings on border river navigation which had not been held since 1967. The Chinese accepted these lower-level talks on 11 May but suggested that they be held one month later, the intention being to disclose no fear by seeming too anxious to begin. These lower-level talks began on 18 June, temporarily reducing tensions. At the same time, the Chinese refused to hold higher-level talks about the entire border dispute; they continued to probe at various points on the border.

Even after the Soviets began to float hints about a possible major attack, the Chinese persisted. They rejected higher-level talks (Chinese government statement of 24 May). They seem to have calculated that they need only monitor Soviet intentions while deterring the Soviets by publicizing Soviet threats, talking at Khabarovsk, and keeping their probes down to small firefights spread out in space and time. Their 24 May statement contained an open complaint that Moscow had "brandished nuclear weapons at China"; on 2 June, an NCNA report listed Soviet nuclear threats, claiming that Moscow was threatening to launch "all-out destructive nuclear counterattacks" from ballistic missile units stationed at the lower Lake Baykal area and along the Sino-Mongolian border; on 26 June, another NCNA report complained about the Soviet use of private statements hinting of the possibility of a major attack.

In July, however, the Chinese started taking soundings among diplomats in Moscow about the USSR's real intentions. This was an early sign that Chinese concern was starting to increase and that their monitoring of Soviet intentions would thereafter be more intense.

*Despite their defeat in March, the Chinese subsequently returned to Chen Pao, dug in their forces, and remain entrenched to this day. The Soviets apparently had a similar view of Chinese rights to this particular island and did not continue to contest it.

B. Chinese Alarm and Retreat: August-September 1969

The Soviets were confronted with the task of convincing the Chinese that the alternative to negotiations was a major attack on China, conventional or nuclear, and that Moscow would not permit the Chinese to bleed the Russians endlessly in a series of small-scale skirmishes. The Soviets set about raising Chinese concern to a level of anxiety sufficient to impel Mao and his aides finally to desist and agree to negotiations.

For example, the Chinese

Further, the Soviets in early August greatly intensified their earlier hints of a possible major attack by ground forces. Privately only, they hinted about a possible preemptive strike against China's nuclear facilities.

While the Chinese carefully monitored this campaign, as late as 12 August they clearly had not yet got the message; that is, they were still contesting Soviet territory. For example, a Chinese unit crossed the border in Sinkiang near the Dzungarian Gate, and was decisively beaten by Soviet forces on 13 August. There were two signs of heightened Chinese concern in the next week. Chinese forward patrolling in contested territory (both in Sinkiang and in the Northeast) apparently ceased, and on 16 August the Chinese chargé in Moscow informed a foreign diplomat that Peking was concerned over signs that the USSR was preparing for "a major military engagement" with China in the near future. He reportedly displayed less confidence than previously in China's ability to handle a Soviet attack and claimed that Peking was always ready to negotiate with Moscow. The possibility of a Soviet "surprise attack" on China was underscored in a Nanking provincial broadcast of 28 August.* This phrase was used in the 28 August Decree on Combat Readiness issued with particular reference to border-area commanders, reflecting in part the intention of Peking to make a show of nation-wide preparedness in order to deter a possible attack. (A secondary purpose of the war preparations propaganda probably was—as it had been during the Taiwan Strait crisis in 1958—to justify continuation of internal austerity by pointing to the external threat to the nation's security.)

If anything further was needed to persuade the Chinese to desist, it was probably supplied by information that Western intelligence services, particularly the American intelligence community, had become alarmed about the possibility of a Soviet strike. The Chinese undoubtedly were aware, from Paris and Tokyo accounts, of a 28 August *Washington Post* article attributing to American intelligence the view that the Soviets might launch an air strike against China's nuclear facilities in the northwest. Furthermore, the article noted that "one key official" in Washington "who only a month earlier had rated the chances of a major Chinese-Soviet fight at about 10 percent recently said that the chances now are only slightly less than 50-50." Also in late August, the Chinese probably had been informed by their chargé in Paris that some French officials also believed that a Soviet air strike could no longer be discounted.

It is likely that Mao and his aides placed considerable credence in estimates made in the American intelligence community (as reflected in the *Washington Post* article) as well as in official French views of Soviet intentions. Mao retreated further from a confrontation in the week after Peking's rejection of a Soviet offer for a Chou-Kosygin meeting in Hanoi at Ho Chi Minh's funeral (4 September). Peking accepted a renewed Soviet bid, resulting in a Chou-Kosygin meeting at the Peking airport (11 September). The 11 September meeting was a reversal by Mao of his policy of refusing leader-to-leader contacts with the Russians, the last such having been the Teng-Brezhnev meeting in Bucharest in June 1965, more than four years before. Although Mao and his aides may have been uncertain as to whether the Soviet threats were to be taken at face value, the Chinese leaders undoubtedly found it prudent to consider a major Soviet attack to be an *imminent possibility.*

Nothing short of such a judgment could have impelled Mao to desist in mid-August from sending out patrols and to agree in early September to a

*Between August and October, Chinese provincial broadcasts for the first time referred to the USSR as China's "principal enemy," officially displacing the US in that role.

leadership-level meeting with the Soviets. This judgment was to be reflected in several additional actions.

— the PRC Government Statement of 7 October, in which the Chinese formally accepted negotiations, contained the most direct and explicit public reference Peking had ever made to the possibility that the Soviets might "dare to raid China's strategic sites";

— the Chinese made it the first order of business, when border negotiations started in Peking on 20 October, to ask for a preliminary agreement in which both sides were to renounce any intention to commit aggression against the other, with conventional or nuclear weapons;

— the Chinese at the same time started a major repositioning of their ground forces away from the previous southeast coastal orientation and toward the border in the north, beginning this operation only after the Chou-Kosygin meeting had taken the heat out of the border confrontation—a delay mainly intended to avoid alarming the Soviets to the point where they might have launched a preemptive strike.

The Chinese informed the French ambassador on 28 October that they had agreed to begin negotiations because they had been pressured by threats of surprise attack, by fear of the Soviet conventional-weapons capability, and by threats of renewed border troubles. Soviet diplomats in Peking privately conceded in October, despite high-level Soviet leadership denials that Moscow had mounted a threat campaign against Peking, that they felt the main Chinese motive in accepting negotiations was anxiety over Soviet military intentions.

III. THE ROAD BACK: DECREASING FEAR OF IMMINENT ATTACK: 1969-1970

The Chinese seemed to have calculated that the Chou-Kosygin agreement to cease forward patrolling on both sides and to begin negotiations in Peking drastically reduced the chance of a major Soviet attack. They settled down to the task of imposing political losses on the Soviets while keeping them engaged in the talks. The Chinese publicly professed to being under threat from the Soviets and, hoping for international condemnation of Moscow, complained that they could not negotiate meaningfully so long as the Soviets refused in advance to withdraw their forces from "disputed" territory. Actually, the Soviet threat was felt to have considerably subsided after negotiations started—subsided to the point where Peking need make no concessions in the negotiations. Indeed, the opening Chinese position at the secret talks was very hard; namely, that the Soviets withdraw their forces from the Chinese-claimed border areas *before* substantive issues could be discussed.* Chou En-lai himself told Chinese cadres in November that although Moscow had stepped up its military pressure to get China to sign a border agreement, China would not be intimidated.

The start of the border negotiations released the tension about a possible attack and enabled the Chinese to extensively reposition their forces without alarming the Soviets.

By the end of 1970, these and other major precautions against a possible Soviet attack had been generally completed; force improvements since then have consisted largely of filling out existing units.** Between 1969 and 1970, the Soviets had considerably reduced the pace of their own buildup along the border, and the Chinese perception of this new phenomenon undoubtedly reinforced their calculation that a Soviet attack was now unlikely. Evidence indicates that the November 1969 recruit-

*Since the beginning of the border talks (20 October 1969), the Soviets have refused to comply with Chinese demands that Moscow withdraw its troops from the border and sign a non-aggression pledge, of course linked to such a major withdrawal. The Soviets have justified their refusal to accept these drastic preconditions by arguing that if they were to pull back there would be nothing remaining to negotiate about. Moreover, they have insisted that their forces do not "threaten" China.

**See the excellent research paper: *China's Military Precautions Against Soviet Attack After the 1969 Border Clashes: A Reexamination.* SR RP 75. March 1975. Analyst: TOP SECRET.

ing drive in the PLA was as selective as ever, and the demobilization and discharge of PLA personnel in the following months took place in the standard manner and in the usual numbers.

Chinese concern about a possible "surprise attack" was further reduced in 1970 even as Peking's effort to improve the strategic positioning of forces and civil defenses continued. The policy still was to avoid provocation at the border. Thus Chou En-lai, speaking to cadres in May 1970 about (among other things) preparations for a possible "quick" war as well as a "protracted" war, stressed China's defensive posture: "don't go looking for provocation; we must be patient."

IV. PEKING EXAGGERATES CONVENTIONAL, DOWNPLAYS NUCLEAR, THREAT: 1970-1972

In order to generate third-country pressure to keep the Soviets restrained and to impose political losses on Moscow for "bullying" China, from mid-1970 the emphasis of Chinese statements on the Soviet threat was shifted away from depicting the danger of a nuclear attack and stressed instead the strength of Soviet *conventional* forces near the border. The Chinese were in fact more vulnerable to nuclear than conventional attack, but the threat of the latter was surely regarded as more credible to the foreign audience the Chinese wanted to reach. To take this line, and to include in it a defiance of Soviet conventional strength—with Peking arguing that China could absorb a major ground attack and successfully fight back despite loss of territory—was more useful for, because more credible to, the Chinese domestic audience also.

The Soviets were highly sensitive to this Chinese complaint of bullying, and the Chinese, perceiving this, hammered away even harder at the size of the conventional threat. The Chinese leaders began in 1970 to put the figure of Soviet troops near the border at about one million. This was the figure Chou En-lai used in the fall of 1970 in a discussion with an Asian official, and in December 1970 in a talk with Edgar Snow. Also in December, a Chinese ambassador in a private conversation put the figure at 1.5 million.

Actually, according to American estimates, Soviet forces in the China border area at the time totaled only about 350,000. Most of the Soviet divisions were undermanned, but even if all the divisions and their support units were filled out, Soviet troop strength in the border area would not have been above 700,000. The figures used by the Chinese in spreading their line about Soviet troop strength were three to four times the actual number there.

[redacted]

Moreover, Chinese knowledge of Soviet military structure, tables of organization, and manning practices makes it even more unlikely that the discrepancy could be attributed to faulty intelligence. Thus, inflation of the figures by the Chinese almost certainly was deliberate, intended primarily to "prove" that the Soviets threatened China, and secondarily, as suggested by use of the line in domestic propaganda, to justify internal austerity.

On the matter of *imminence* of attack, the Chinese were relaxed in the spring of 1970, continuing the retreat from alarm. Chou in May 1970 told senior cadres that war preparations were a "long-term" matter and that China was already partially prepared if war were to start "in the 1970s."

The Chinese did not remain completely silent about a possible Soviet *nuclear* strike, but, when they did refer to it, they usually insisted that they could survive such a strike with their "war preparations" activities. A second-level Chinese official in Europe stated privately in April 1971 that underground facilities *would* enable China to protect its industrial bases and population in the event of "a nuclear attack," and Chou En-lai himself told a correspondent on 5 August 1971 that China's system of underground shelters would be effective against nuclear attack:

> We Chinese are not afraid of atom bombs. We are prepared against their attack, against their launching a preemptive attack on us. That is why we are digging underground tunnels.

[redacted]

it is highly unlikely that underground shelters—the main ingredient in Peking's high-profile surviv-

ability propaganda were or are an important factor in Soviet thinking.*

The attempted defection to the Soviet Union of Defense Minister Lin Piao in mid-September 1971—although Lin had apparently not conspired with the Russians, he possessed enormously valuable information—put the Chinese leaders on the alert for similar attempts. The Chinese, [redacted] tried to explain to cadres why there had been a national standdown in civil and commercial flights; the ostensible reason was that the Soviets might attack, making a special alert necessary. Actually, the purposes of the standdown were to conceal the fact that Lin had tried to defect and to prevent other Chinese officials—Lin's remaining sympathizers—from attempting a similar act of desperation. Peking also concealed the fact that, far from preparing for a major attack on China, the Soviet leaders at the time of Lin's aborted effort had asked Mao and his aides for a summit meeting with any leader they were willing to send to Moscow. The indicators the Chinese had from the Soviets were all conciliatory, not hostile.

Evidence that later became available indicated that the Chinese began at that time to cut sharply the production of military aircraft and to slow the construction of airfields. Between 1969 and 1971, the production of combat aircraft had risen to the unprecedented rate of 60 to 70 aircraft per month; during 1972, it dropped to an average of about 15 per month. Production of the MIG-17 and the MIG-21 apparently stopped completely, while the monthly output of the TU-16 medium bomber was cut from 2 to less than 1, and the F-9, from 8 to 4. Cutbacks in the production of naval ships and land armaments were also made, although they were much less severe. The construction of airfields had also risen dramatically between 1969 and 1971; no new construction starts were observed after mid-1972. Although the reasons for the cutbacks are not altogether clear, the fact that a decision affecting such a vital aspect of China's defense capabilities was taken at this time suggests an estimate that the chances of a major Soviet attack were small.

In the fall and winter of 1972, concern about a Soviet attack seemed to be even further reduced, and the Chinese continued to believe that a nuclear attack was less likely than a conventional thrust. They seem to have taken some comfort from the high-visibility trips to Peking of the American President in February and the Japanese Prime Minister in September, calculating that the Soviet leaders would be more reluctant than ever before to attack China after friendly relations had been established with two major Pacific powers. Chou En-lai's chief aide, Chiao Kuan-hua, told French officials in November that a Soviet attack was not anticipated "now"—the strongest negative statement on the matter by any Chinese official since the time of Chinese alarm in August-September 1969. In December, however, Chiao told American scholars that a Soviet attack might come *after* Mao died, at which time the Soviets might try to take advantage of tensions in China. This is believed to be a genuine fear on the part of at least *some* Chinese leaders, although their general estimate is probably—as it is in the West—that the Russians will wait to see the shape and assess the intentions of the new Chinese leadership, rather than becoming involved in a protracted and probably indecisive war with China.

Regarding the nature of a possible future attack, Chou En-lai told [redacted] in November 1972 that the Chinese were primarily concerned about a Soviet armor thrust into northeast and north China.* At this time, an official believed

*In speaking to more knowledgeable foreigners, the Chinese conceded that the shelters were vulnerable in the event of a nuclear attack. Chou himself, speaking [redacted] in November 1972, made such a concession indirectly. He stated that China anticipated a conventional attack, that the Soviets would use nuclear weapons only if conventional units had failed to attain their goals, and that therefore the underground shelters were designed more for conventional than nuclear war. This was to be the Chinese line. Teng Hsiao-ping told [redacted] officials in October 1974 that the underground shelters they had visited were meant for defense against conventional rather than nuclear attack.

*The Chinese seem to fear Soviet armor above all in the event of a conventional war. In October 1973, a member of the PRC's military delegation to their UN mission suggested to an American contact that the US should not withdraw tanks from NATO forces nor seek to persuade the USSR to withdraw tanks if the US desires to maintain allied security in Europe. The Chinese officer apparently feared that Soviet tanks could be redeployed against China and that this might be a greater threat to China than fighter aircraft or other conventional weapons which force-reduction talks might release for Moscow to redeploy.

connected with the Foreign Ministry stated privately that there had been a considerable amount of discussion in China about the best measures of defense to be taken against Soviet conventional forces, especially because the PLA had no match in kind for the heavily mechanized Soviet forces. (In point of fact, the Soviets oppose the Chinese along the border with more than three times the number of tanks Peking has deployed—tanks qualitatively superior as well.) The Chinese acknowledged, in March and October 1972, the problem of defending against the superior firepower and armored strength of the Soviets, but continued to insist that they could successfully beat off a major conventional attack.

Since the late 1969-1971 period, in which five Chinese armies had been shifted to the central and northern military regions, there had been few significant changes in the positioning of main force Chinese units. Work on a number of defensive sites near the border, along possible invasion routes, had begun in late 1969 and early 1970, and these sites were improved and hardened during 1971 and 1972. The number of border security outposts manned by squad- and platoon-level units near the border also began to be increased. Although main force units continued to be held 150-300 miles back from the border, these defensive sites and outposts were positioned to provide a forward covering force for important areas and to slow and channelize any Soviet invasion. They showed that the Chinese were prepared to put up increasingly stiff resistance against a Soviet attack. Greatest attention was given to the area north and northwest of Peking, where defensive positions were established in rugged terrain 50-100 miles from the border. Chinese strategy seemed to be to concede territory in Sinkiang and in the northern Shenyang Military Region, where terrain features and tactical considerations would make a stand near the border less feasible.

The Chinese view of a possible nuclear attack in this period was that the Soviets would not use nuclear weapons unless greatly provoked. They calculated that the Soviets would be unwilling to take tremendous political losses internationally.*

*The Chinese probably also believed that their own *nuclear* capability was now a mini-deterrent—as the Soviets could not be certain they had targetted all of China's nuclear missile sites.

The first clear statement made by an important Chinese official virtually *dismissing* the chance of a Soviet nuclear attack was made by Chiao Kuan-hua to American scholars in December 1972. Chiao said: "no responsible government would ever dare to use nuclear weapons" and risk international political losses—i.e., "the people of the world are against it." Chiao pointed out that it had been many years now since the US used an atom bomb, suggesting that the Soviets were similarly reluctant to be condemned internationally.

Nevertheless, the Chinese have continued to develop their nuclear missile force. The Chinese have, on occasion, discussed the possibility of a Soviet-Chinese war being fought with nuclear weapons, following an initial Soviet nuclear strike. Indeed, the gradual deployment of their medium-range and intermediate-range strategic missiles in recent years reflects a strategy first to add to the deterrent of public opprobrium their own mini-deterrent of nuclear weapons, and, in the event that deterrence fails, to inflict *some* damage on Soviet cities with their small force. (Some Chinese missiles, however, could only be used in theater support operations, to strike concentrations of Soviet troops *within* China.)

Thus, in March 1972, a Chinese embassy official [redacted] told [redacted] that China had enough missiles to destroy all major Soviet installations (read, cities) in Siberia, but did not yet have the capability of reaching European USSR. This was an accurate assessment. In June 1972, an NCNA official in Bonn stated privately that China had made preparations for war, even those necessary for a nuclear war, and that, although China would not use nuclear weapons first, it would use them in defense.

V. CHINESE FEAR NATO FORCE REDUCTIONS: 1972-1975

The prospective European security conference and force-reduction talks created a new concern for the Chinese: any agreement on troop reductions in NATO forces would strengthen Soviet-Western detente and thus provide the Soviets with a freer hand to confront Chinese forces. The Chinese have tried to establish the view that European governments should not trust the Soviets, and have

given candid depictions of their own security interests.

Chou En-lai in January 1972 pointed to the possibility that

> . . . there will be an East West detente and the Soviet troops will come on to the northern frontier of China. This disturbs us. Are not the million men already present on our northern border suffic. nt?

Mao himself in July asserted that a million Russian soldiers had been "shifted" from the Western front to the Chinese border; he went on to suggest wryly that China should be given credit for the shift toward detente in Europe as a consequence. The implication was that European countries, especially France, were dealing with the USSR at China's expense and that China would prefer an end to detente.

Chinese concern was extended by the start of preliminary talks for a European security conference in November 1972. In January 1973, Chou En-lai and other Chinese officials spread the line that the security conference might create a false sense of security; that Peking, rather than favoring big cutbacks in American forces in Europe, now recognized the need for an American nuclear deterrent; and that NATO was indeed necessary and should remain intact until Europeans could defend themselves without the American nuclear umbrella. The Chinese press subsequently ceased its attacks on NATO.

A. The Threat is "To the West," Not China: March 1973

After four years of insisting that the Soviet military spearhead was directed at *China*, Mao and his aides decided to change the line and to insist the spearhead is directed at the *West*. The message in this change was: to NATO countries, that they should reject proposals for force reductions; and, secondarily, to the US, that Washington should recognize that China does not need rapprochement so desperately as to be indifferent to a virtual halt in American disengagement from Taipei.*

In a March 1973 conversation, in which he was apparently conveying the views of the top Chinese leadership, Chou cited Soviet force levels for the European and Chinese fronts which were fairly close to those estimated by the West. In other words, Chou was using correct figures in order to make the point that the West, i.e., Western Europe, was the primary target. Chou went on to say that Soviet military pressure against China was maintained primarily to frighten the Chinese people. Chou implied that Chinese leaders were not frightened, believing that the USSR would prove unwilling to initiate a major war with China although there might be isolated border skirmishes.*

In his August 1973 speech to the Tenth Party Congress, Chou En-lai raised the matter of whether Soviet strategy was directed against China ("the East") or the West.

> The West always wants to urge the Soviet revisionists eastward towards China, and it would be fine so long as all is quiet in the West. China is an attractive piece of meat coveted by all. But this piece of meat is very tough, and for years no one has been able to bite into it. . . . At present, the Soviet revisionists are *"making a feint to the east while attacking in the west,"* and stepping up their contention in Europe and their expansion in the Mediterranean, the Indian Ocean and every place their hands can reach. . . .
>
> We must . . . be fully prepared against any war of aggression that imperialism may launch and particularly against *surprise attack* on our country by Soviet revisionist social-imperialism. [emphasis supplied]

During French President Pompidou's visit to Peking in mid-September 1973, senior Chinese officials said they were worried about the possibility of a Soviet attack on China and, at the same time, asked why Europeans were so apathetic in view

*This secondary line is implicit. When discussing the Sino-American relationship explicitly, Chinese officials may deny *any* need for it, and indeed have said that Americans "erroneously believe" that China "needs" US help to bolster its position against the USSR.

*The force figures given by Chou were not only fairly accurate, but had been available in open publications in the West for several years, and were therefore not new to the Chinese leaders. The March 1973 change in line clearly was not the result of acquisition of new data on Soviet troop deployment but a consequence of concern in Peking that possible troop reductions in Europe would lead to increases in the numbers of Soviet troops on China's border. The March 1973 figures represented a buildup which had begun in 1965 and had been largely completed by 1970. The figures have not changed greatly since. Current Soviet strength along the border is estimated to be about 400,000 men in 37 divisions.

of the Soviet threat. Chou himself stated that he believed the Soviets intended to make an attack on China in the near future. The French came away confused, uncertain whether the Chinese were sincere or merely professing fear in order to influence the French government against the Soviets. The latter seems the more probable explanation.

There is no evidence that the Chinese were engaged in military action on the border in the summer of 1973—action such as forward patrolling or skirmishing with Soviet river-navigation workers. Their policy continued to be to avoid provocation. Actual fear of a near-term Soviet attack was not reflected in Chou's remarks to Prime Minister Trudeau of Canada in mid-October. Chou said that unpreparedness on the part of the Chinese would invite Soviet military action against China but that he was not worried about the prospect of an attack.

As for the direction or main focus of the Soviet threat, even if it were to be "to the east," China would be the last major power to be hit. Chou even tried to convince Foreign Minister Ohira in early January 1974 that any Soviet attack to the east would be directed at the US first, Japan next, and then China. The Japanese, aware that their confrontation with the Soviets over four islands was not of the same military nature as the Chinese confrontation at the border with the Russians, apparently did not view Chou's conjectured sequence of an eastward attack as credible. There is no evidence that Chou changed the prevailing view in Tokyo that Peking greatly needed rapprochement with the US and good relations with Japan because of its dispute with Moscow.

B. A Soviet-American War is "Inevitable": April 1974

The Chinese hit at detente from another angle when they tried to demonstrate to Europeans that they could not sit back, that war was "inevitable," and that therefore they would be involved. In such a situation, Peking argued, force reductions would greatly soften the Europeans prior to a Soviet attack. Chou and other Chinese leaders, however, had a credibility problem in trying to convince European leaders that a Soviet-American war was "inevitable." In April 1974, Chou angrily hammered away at this line in a discussion with Austria's Foreign Minister Kirchschlaeger, vehemently attacking detente and insisting that not only a Soviet war with the US, but also a Soviet war with Europe, was "inevitable."

Chou formalized the idea in his 13 January 1975 report to the fourth National People's Congress (NPC), insisting that Soviet-American rivalry "is bound to lead to world war some day." At the same time, Chou downgraded the image of the Soviet threat to China, omitting from his report the explicit reference to a possible surprise attack, "particularly" from the Soviet Union against China—a reference he had made in reporting to the Party Congress in August 1973. He again insisted, as he had in the Party Congress report in 1973, that the threat is to the West.

C. The US Nuclear Deterrent for Europe is Unreliable: January 1975

The Chinese have also argued that the US would seek to avoid involvement in a European war with its nuclear weapons. (This line tends to contradict the line about an inevitable Soviet-American war.) Clearly the fear that a formal European security conference might be held in 1975, and at the level of a summit meeting, impelled the Chinese to engage in extravagant pleading.

During talks in early January 1975, Teng Hsiao-ping and Chiao Kuan-hua stressed the inevitability of war in Europe—which the Soviets would start with conventional weapons. The Soviets would *not* use nuclear weapons, the Chinese said, because they expected to conquer and occupy Western Europe. The Chinese said that the US would not risk its own survival by employing its nuclear weapons to repel Soviet aggression in Europe. The Chinese concluded that a strong NATO was essential as a short-term deterrent to a Soviet attack, but that in the long run Western Europe's only salvation lay in developing an "independent" and credible nuclear force "of its own."

The Chinese have used their own position—i.e., a Soviet attack on China probably would be conventional rather than nuclear—to combat the view among European leaders that the US nuclear deterrent would prevent any Soviet attack, provide security for NATO, and thus permit NATO countries to reduce their forces. They have gone on to

contend that a Soviet-American war might well be fought entirely with conventional weapons, and that European states would need large conventional forces.

The concern of Mao about detente and possible Western force reductions (and the implications of that for China's security) clearly has impelled him to show personal favor to European political figures who oppose detente with the Soviets and advocate strong Western defenses. Thus he has granted personal interviews—extraordinary treatment—to two such men, former Prime Minister Heath of the UK and former Defense Minister Strauss of West Germany. Mao has done this despite the fact that they are political opponents of the current heads of government in London and Bonn.

VI. PROSPECTS

The Chinese view of the Soviet military threat today is short of fear, but also short of complacence. As has been seen, they recognize that the Soviets may be tempted to exploit a period of instability after Mao's death—meaning, presumably, that some Soviet leaders might advocate intervening militarily in the hope that disaffected groups in China would overthrow the successor leadership rather than unite against the invader, or in support of some one group of leaders whom they believed or hoped to be pro-Soviet. Moreover, the Chinese view is long-term; they see the strategic threat from the north as persisting for many years. They seem also to be worried about the prospect of "encirclement"—that is, about the expansion of Soviet influence in India, the Soviet-Indian treaty, and the presence of Soviet naval units in the Indian Ocean, in the Sea of Japan, and even in the Taiwan Strait.

The confrontation at the border, being a result of Mao's desire to contest territory which he had left uncontested for a decade after the founding of the PRC, will probably extend at least to the time of Mao's death. After Mao dies, the matter of whether he really acted in China's national interest or from reasons of personal affront or contempt almost certainly will be discussed within the leadership, and it is probable that some leaders will actively argue for a softening of the hard Chinese terms for a border settlement. The duration of the border confrontation at that future time will probably depend on the nature of a collective leadership, as no one single leader will be able to impose his personal policy on the Party in the way that Mao has. While Mao lives, however, there is not likely to be a softening of Chinese terms.

Mao's way of living with the border confrontation which he provoked, a situation in which the Chinese are dramatically inferior not only in nuclear weapons but in conventional armament, will probably continue to leave a wide margin of safety by avoiding aggressive action on the border. That is, there will be no forward patrolling and no shooting at Soviet border guards or river-navigation workers.

An important aspect of this policy of avoiding a Soviet attack is to keep the Soviet leaders convinced—as they seem to have been after negotiations started in 1969 and still seem to be—that China's military posture is defensive, as in fact it is. The Chinese probably will continue to do this in several ways in the near future.

Thus they can be expected to continue to avoid deploying aircraft in reaction to Soviet border reconnaissance flights—even those tracked within Chinese airspace [redacted]. This cautious policy may persist even after the Chinese have produced and deployed up-to-date SAMs, inasmuch as China's overall military inferiority will remain. The Chinese probably will be more careful than the Soviets have been to keep their own border reconnaissance flights within their own territory.

They undoubtedly will maintain their public position: China will not be the first to attack an opponent (with nuclear or conventional weapons), but will hit back if attacked (leaving it ambiguous whether the counterattack will be entirely with conventional weapons or also with nuclear weapons). On occasion, they may state privately their intention to strike back with whatever nuclear missiles they have deployed if the Soviets should attack China with nuclear weapons. However, the main thrust of their private statements probably will continue to be that they believe a possible future Soviet attack will be with conventional weapons, mainly armor. They probably also will

continue to say that they do not anticipate *any* Soviet attack in the near future.

Although they will sustain their effort to convince European leaders not to reduce NATO's conventional troop strength, their appeal probably will have little effect. Maintenance of force levels in NATO will be determined by the interests of members themselves, as will be the case in any force reductions. The slow pace of the European security conference as well as mutual balanced force reduction talks should keep the Chinese, on balance, satisfied that Moscow will not have a freer hand to deal with its "eastern problem" at an early date.

Finally, the Chinese will probably try to sustain and strengthen the Sino-American rapprochement as a stronger long-term deterrent to Soviet attack than China itself can provide. At the same time, Peking will continue to encourage Washington to break diplomatic ties with Taiwan. This policy of rapprochement will continue to limit the degree of permissible Chinese criticism of the US, giving this criticism its staccato appearance—in contrast to the unmitigated polemical assault on the USSR, an assault that undoubtedly will continue at least until Mao dies. Because Peking intends to get hold of Taiwan one way or another, it can be expected to try to persuade the US that China does not need rapprochement at the cost of a halt in US disengagement from Taipei. Should it come to a choice, however, the value to Peking of rapprochement with the US against the Soviet threat would probably prove to be greater than the value of early annexation of Taiwan, which could not much help Peking strategically.

The Chinese are aware from Soviet behavior in the border confrontation that the Russians are not eager for a war with China, despite the USSR's overwhelming military superiority. They are also aware that there will be no *need* for a Russian attack on China, as that overwhelming superiority will be retained for many years to come. While they have to consider the possibility that the Soviets will see some *advantage* in making an attack in the period immediately following Mao's death or in some subsequent time of possible crisis, they can calculate with some confidence that the costs would probably be regarded by any Soviet leadership as prohibitively great. That is, a Soviet attack would be much more likely to remove any possibility of exploiting latent pro-Soviet (or, at least, conciliatory) forces in China than to attract huge numbers of Chinese to the Soviet banner or to impose a pro-Soviet leadership group and would mobilize world opinion overwhelmingly against Moscow. Moreover, the war could probably not really be won, as Soviet superiority in materiel would be negated by Chinese manpower and determination, and China could not (unlike Czechoslovakia) be successfully occupied—even after a nuclear strike on Chinese cities. The Chinese can further judge that the commonsense thing for Moscow to do is to wait, to assess the shape and intentions of the post-Mao leadership, to make initiatives for an improvement in relations if the ground seems favorable, or to wait for Chinese initiatives from that leadership or some successor leadership, looking for an improvement sooner or later by political and economic means.

In sum, the Chinese appear to believe that, owing both to Soviet calculations and their own policies designed to avoid or discourage a Soviet military attack, a major attack is unlikely, in either the short term or the long term.